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MAGICAL FORMULAE ON LINTELS OF THE
CHRISTIAN PERIOD IN SYRIA

MOST of the Greek inscriptions of Syria, from the early part of the fourth century of the Christian era and onward, are of an apparently religious character. The same statement may be made of the Greek inscriptions of the late empire generally. Many of these are on tombs, many are on churches ; the majority are on dwelling-houses ; and yet even in these latter a seemingly religious element predominates.

Three years ago I discussed before the American Philological Association¹ certain Syrian inscriptions, which seemed to me to reflect the Syrian ritual of this period. But the fact that any of these inscriptions, or others, contain passages from the Church service does not explain why they were carved on buildings : much less does it account for the presence of many inscriptions which obviously have nothing to do with customary forms of worship. Moreover, I do not consider that in discussing the purpose of these inscriptions it is possible to dissociate them from the many symbols, most of them Christian symbols, crosses and the like, which abound in the same region.

Doubtless after the formal triumph of Christianity, the Christians took pride in proclaiming their religion in this way. Perhaps also the open profession of Christianity in this period gave greater security of possession to householders. Perhaps in some cases there was a genuine desire to hold the cross before men's eyes, and to propagate religion by these pious words. Probably these inscriptions and symbols oftentimes were merely ornamental, and matters of the fashion of the age,

¹ *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, XXXIII (1902), pp. 81 ff.

much like the mottoes which some people still hang upon their walls. But I believe that the main purpose of both inscriptions and symbols was either to bring good luck or to avert evil, *i.e.* evil spirits. Certainly the name of God has always been, and is now, in the East, the most potent charm against evil : so also, in the "Christian" period, the name and symbols of the Christ. Hence such symbols, and phrases containing the names of God or Christ, were carved or scratched or painted everywhere, even on the interior walls of stables, wine-presses, and shops ; hence, also, the commonest place for such carving was the lintel or some part of the frame of a door or window, not only because this is the most natural place for ornament of any sort, but also because, as is well known, evil spirits, however ethereal, do not penetrate solid walls, but, like the rest of us, enter by the door or perhaps through the window.

A special form of ornamentation occurs on Syrian lintels with the greatest frequency, a form for which the name *disk* has been employed. These "disks," however, are not always circular : some are simple squares, some formed by two squares crossed, some are hexagons or octagons. They measure from six inches to two feet across, and formed a convenient frame for symbols of every sort. Most of them contain the cross in some form or other, P or X , $\Lambda\Omega$, the name of God, or of Christ, Emmanuel, or the like. Some, however, contain no Christian symbols whatever, and recall rather certain of the emblems of ancient pagan gods. Common among these non-Christian "disks" are circles filled with curved lines raying from the centres, suggesting whirling spheres ; also stars of five, six, or eight points. M. Schlumberger, in an article in the *Revue des Études Grecques*, V (1892), p. 87, quotes a brief passage from Alexander of Tralles (*Θεραπευτικά*, X, 1), which gives the following prescription for an amulet to be used as a preventative of colic, the cause of which was thought, by Alexander at least, to be the bile : "Take an iron finger-ring," he says, "and make the ring an octagon, and so write upon it $\phi\epsilon\upsilon\gamma\epsilon, \iota\omicron\upsilon \chi\omega\lambda\acute{\eta} \cdot \acute{\eta} \kappa\omicron\rho\upsilon\delta\alpha\lambda\acute{o}\varsigma \sigma\epsilon \zeta\eta\tau\epsilon\acute{\iota}$," *i.e.* *Flee, oh bile ; the lark pursues thee.*

Evidently the shape of the amulet had something to do with its effectiveness. Another amulet, now in the Cabinet des Médailles de France,¹ contains the words 'Αναχώρι, κόλε, τὸ θῖόν σε διώκει, i.e. ἀναχώρει, χωλή(?), τὸ θεῖόν σε διώκει. I do not feel certain whether τὸ θῖον means *The Deity* or *sulphur*; but in either case the bile (or something else) is directed to withdraw. Now this second amulet is in the form of an eight-pointed star, and it seems to me quite possible that some of the "disks" on the Syrian lintels, such, for example, as the octagons and the eight-pointed stars, may have had their origin in the same superstitions as these amulets. It is possible that other "disks" had their origin in symbols of pagan religion, and perhaps were used in very ancient times to protect dwellings against evil spirits and to attract the powers of good.

Certainly there is evidence that the custom of inscribing door-frames in some way is older than the Christian religion. One of the commonest formulae on lintels in Syria is the phrase Εἰς Θεὸς μόνος: *there is one God only*. On my first visit to Syria I found it in one form or another in thirty-three inscriptions; it is to be found in all collections of similar inscriptions.² Speaking of this phrase, M. Clermont-Ganneau, in the *Quarterly Statements of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, 1882, p. 26,³ says, "The Christian character of this formula it clearly demonstrated."⁴ "It is probably of Jewish origin, and must have sprung from the well-known verse (the fourth) in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, which contains the word יהוה אחד *Jehovah-ahad*, rendered in the Septuagint by Κύριος Εἰς, and which precedes the dissertation on the Commandments." "It is, properly speaking, the axiom of monotheism, besides which

¹ Published by Lenormant in the *Revue Archéologique*, III, 2 (1846), p. 510. Both these amulets belong probably to the first half of the sixth century.

² E.g. *C.I.G.* 8945, 9154, etc.; cf. also 8946. See also Chabot's index of Waddington's inscriptions, and note 4 below.

³ See also Clermont-Ganneau, *Recueil*, I, pp. 169 f., and *Rapports sur une Mission en Palestine et en Phénicie* (1881), pp. 21 ff.

⁴ By the examples cited from Waddington, *Inscr. Grec. et Lat. de la Syrie*, Nos. 2066, 2689, 2682, 2704, 2562 l, 2451, 2262, 2057, 2053 b, 1918.

it plays an important part in the Jewish liturgy." "It is worthy of remark that this formula is generally found inscribed above the entrance doors, as ordained in the ninth verse (with regard to the Commandments, of which it is, so to say, the preamble), 'And thou shalt write them on the posts of thy house and on thy gates.'" In fact, the *Εἰς Θεός* has been found on monuments distinctively Jewish or at least Jewish-Christian.¹

But whatever is the origin of this custom, the character of many of these inscriptions as formulae to avert evil is shown clearly by the following examples, some of which are still unpublished; all of them are from lintels. First, from Dêr Sambil, dating probably from the fifth century of our era:

ΧΜΓ.² Χ(ριστο)ῦ τὸ νῖκος. φεύγε, Σατανᾶ:

Ch(rist) b(orn) (of) M(ary). Christ's the victory. Flee, Satan! Secondly, from Herakeh, 524 A.D.: ✠ Ὁ δεσπότης ἡμῶν Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστό)ς, ὁ Υἱός, ὁ Λόγος τ(οῦ) Θ(εο)ῦ, ἐνθάδε [κ]ατοικεῖ· μηδὲν ἰσὶτω κακόν: *Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, the Word of God, dwells here: let no evil enter.* The next, from I'djâz, is really in the form of a prayer to God, and hence does not properly belong with the others; its purpose, however, is the same, and it helps to explain the meaning of those which follow. It is in eleven hexameters, of which I quote the fifth, sixth, and seventh:

Χριστὸς ἀειζώ(ι)ων λυ[σι]πήμονα χεῖρα κομίζει·
τοῦνεκα οὐ τρομέομι κακορρέκτοιο μηχανὰς
δαίμονος οὐδ' ἀνδρὸς στυγερὸν καὶ ἀθέσμιον ὄμμα:

*Christ, ever-living, bears (his) hand that-frees-from-ill:
therefore I fear not the machinations of evil-working
demon, nor the hateful and lawless eye of man.*

¹ See Shick, *Quarterly Statements P.E.F.*, 1887, p. 55; Clermont-Ganneau, *Recueil*, I, p. 170; also *Publications of an Am. Arch. Expedition to Syria in 1899-1900*, III, No. 25. See also my article on 'Fragments of an Early Christian Liturgy,' in *Transactions Am. Philol. Assoc.* XXXIII (1902), pp. 93 ff.

² On these letters see below, p. 145.

The next, from Sabbâ', dated 546 A.D., is unfortunately badly mutilated, so that nearly half of each of the three lines has been lost. In the centre of the lintel were two, perhaps originally three, disks, each containing a cross. My restoration of the text is as follows: ✠'Ετους ηνω', μη[νὸς Περιτίου (?)] - - '. Τοῦ οἴκο]ν τούτου Κύριος διαφυλάξει τὴν ἴσ[οδον καὶ τὴν ἔξοδον]. (τ)ο(ῦ) σταυροῦ γὰρ προκιμένου οὐ'σχύ[σει ὁφθαλμὸς βάσκα]νος: *In (the) year 858 (= 546 A.D.) in (the) month Peritius (?). Of this house (the) Lord shall guard the entrance and the exit: for the cross being set before, no malignant eye shall prevail (against it).*¹ The last line is, of course, most uncertain: the words σταυροῦ γὰρ προκιμένου, however, are preserved here, and were found again on the fragments of a lintel at il-Anderîn, which also contain a disk with a cross: ✠ Σταυροῦ πρ[οκι]μένου . . . [οὐκ ἔ]σχύ[σει]. . . . Lastly, a broken lintel from 'Odjeh contains a disk with a cross in relief, and the words 'Εν ἔτι 5ψ' ἐτελέσθη. ὑπ(ό)κιμε πρὸς εὐψυχίαν τῶν ἐνθάδε κατ[οικοῦν-των(?)]: *In the year 706 (= 394 A.D.). I am set for the peace of those that dwell here.* I believe that the verb refers to the sculptured cross as its subject, and that the inscription is in all respects comparable to that on the golden bell found at Rome, and published by Bruzza in the *Annali dell' Istituto*, 1875, pp. 50 ff.,² Τοῖς ὄμμασιν ὑποτέταγμαι: *I am set against eyes.* Obviously the bell was a charm against the evil eye.

Now it may appear to some that, while these few examples which I have quoted are perhaps magical in character, the many other inscriptions which contain quotations from the Psalms, or combinations of quotations, such as *Lord save thy people, and bless thine inheritance*, words which appear also in the ancient Greek liturgies, or such phrases as *Lord Jesus Christ help so and so*, are genuine expressions of piety. But many of these same phrases and quotations appear in the magic

¹ Cf. Matthew xvi. 18, which is quoted in an inscription on the lintel of a church in Mu'allak, dated 606 A.D. (*Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 332). See also *ibid.* No. 91.

² Also in *Inscriptiones Graecae*, XIV, No. 2409, 5.

formulae preserved in the literature and on amulets. And the strangest part of it all is the incomprehensible commingling of Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity in these formulae. M. Schlumberger, in the article already mentioned, *Revue des Études Grecques*, V (1892), p. 93, quotes a number of examples of such formulae from the *Geoponica*, which is dedicated to Porphyrogenetus (Constantine VII, 911-959). First, a prescription to prevent wine from turning sour: "Write upon the casks, or upon an apple which you will then throw into the wine, these divine words (θεῖα γράμματα), 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.'" ¹ Second, a prescription for enabling one to drink a great deal of wine without becoming intoxicated: "Repeat, when taking the first drink, this verse from Homer: 'But upon them from the heights of Ida, wise Zeus has thundered.'" Third, a prescription to keep away snakes from a dove-cot: "Write the word 'Αδάμ (*Adam*) on the four corners of the cot." Fourth, to secure a miraculous catch of fish: "Write on a shell the words 'Ιαὼ Σαβαώθ ² [*Lord of Sabaoth*], and throw it in the water."

One of the most remarkable of the amulets is that published in the *C.I.G.* IV, No. 9065. One side bears the figures of Christ upon the cross, with the Mother of Jesus, St. John, and others. Beside the figures is written, 'Ι(ησοῦ)ς Χ(ριστό)ς. π(άτε)ρ, εἰς χίρās σου παρ[α]τίθ[η]μι τὸ π(νεῦ)μά μου. 'Η μήτηρ σου ὁ υἱός σου: *Jesus Christ. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit! (Behold) thy mother! (Behold) thy son!* The reverse bears the legend: φεύγ' ἀπ' ἐμ[ῆ]ς κραδίης, δολομήχανε, φεύγε τάχιστα, φεύγ' ἀπ' ἐμῶν μελέων, ὄφι, πῦρ, . . . Χ(ριστὸ)ς ἄναξ κέλετέ σε φυγε[ί]ν ἐ[ί]ς λῆτμα θαλάσσης κτλ.: *Flee from my heart, thou mischief-maker, flee quickly, flee from my limbs, snake, fire! . . . Christ (the) king bids thee flee, into the depths of the sea, etc.* The words *Flee, thou mischief-maker* recall the inscription of the house at Dêr Sambil, with its *Flee*,

¹ Psalms xxxiv, 8 (in Sept. XXXIII, 9).

² 'Ιαὼ = יהוה = (*Jehovah*) *Adonai* = (in the Septuagint) Κύριος. 'Ιαὼ Σαβαώ (θ) appears also on amulets, e.g. *Rev. d. Ét. Grecques*, V, pp. 81 f.

Satan. Another amulet from Constantinople, published by M. Schlumberger in the *Revue des Études Grecques*, V (1892), p. 77, bears about the rim of the obverse the legend [✠ Φεύγε μ-] *εμισιμένι, δίοκι σε ὁ ἄγγελος Ἀρχαφ*¹ *ς(= καὶ) Οὐριέλ· φεύγε μ-[σουμένη(?)]: Flee, hated (plague)! The angel Archaph (or Arlaph) pursues thee, and Uriel : Flee, hateful!* The rest of this face of the amulet is described by M. Schlumberger as follows : “ In the field, unfortunately badly corroded, appear the three magi, with hats on their heads ; behind them is a tree. They are presenting themselves before the Virgin, who is seated upon a throne and holding the Child Jesus. . . . Back of the figure of the Virgin are the words Χριστὸς νικᾷ, followed by certain letters now illegible. Below are the words Ἐμμα[νουή]λ, Θε[ός].” The names of archangels, especially the name of Michael, are found repeatedly on lintels in Syria, particularly in il-Anderin and its neighborhood. The names of Michael and Gabriel appear on the lintel of one of the doors of the great church at Ḳalb Lauzeh. These two names, Michael and Gabriel, are found together on amulets from Beirût and elsewhere.² Michael appears with Solomon in the inscription of a very singular amulet,³ the text of which is as follows : Διαθήκη ἣν ἔθεντο ἐπὶ τοῦ μεγάλου Σολομῶνος καὶ Μιχαήλου τοῦ ἀγγέλου, μὴ ἄψασθαι τῆς φορούσης : *Covenant which they made under the great Solomon and Michael the angel, not to touch the bearer.* The words Χριστὸς νικᾷ, *Christ conquers*, on the Constantinople amulet, occur frequently on the buildings, for example at Dêr Sim‘ân, il-Bârah, and Serdjilla.⁴ Sometimes other, but equivalent, expressions are used in the inscriptions, such as ✠ Νίκαε,⁵ (*In this cross*) *conquer* ; Τὸ σημίων τοῦτο νικᾷ,⁶ *This sign con-*

¹ Compare another amulet found at Smyrna, and published in the same article by Schlumberger, p. 76 : φεύγε μεμισιμένι, Ἀρλαφ ὁ ἄγγελός σε δίοκι. Both of these are thought by Schlumberger to be somewhat later than the second half of the third century of our era.

² Schlumberger, *l. c.* V, p. 83. Also Perdrizet, in *Rev. d. ét. Grecques*, XVI (1903), pp. 46 ff., where these names are joined with those of Uriel and Raphael.

³ Schlumberger, *l. c.* p. 87.

⁴ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, Nos. 124, 201, and 219.

⁵ *Ibid.* No. 210.

⁶ *Ibid.* No. 255.

quers; Χριστοῦ τὸ νίκος,¹ *Christ's is the victory*. The meaning of these phrases is made clear by the amulets that contain such formulae as Εἰς θεὸς ὁ νικῶν τὰ κακά,² *One God who conquers the evil*. Certainly there can be no doubt that the amulets refer to the overcoming of evil spirits, or, in general, the powers of evil. The name Ἐμμανουήλ, also, which appears on the Constantinople amulet, is found similarly on lintels, once joined with Χριστὸς νικᾷ, as on the amulet³; it is found again in the disk on the lintel of the citadel of Khanâsir.⁴

But the most significant of all these amulets, in this connection, is one in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It is described as a small object not unlike a thick nail, with a hole through it near one end, doubtless for the cord by which it was hung about the neck. The four sides bear an inscription which was published first by Dr. Isaac Hall in 1894,⁵ and discussed by Professor T. F. Wright in the following year.⁶ I have not yet been able to see the amulet myself; but I believe it should be read as follows: 'Ο κατοικῶν ἐν βοηθίᾳ τοῦ Ἱψίστου, βοήθι, | ἅγιος Κύριος, | Ἰουλιάνῳ, | τῷ δούλῳ σου, τῷ φοροῦντι: *He that dwelleth in the help of the Most High, help, holy Lord, Julianos, thy servant, the bearer*. The words ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοηθίᾳ τοῦ Ἱψίστου are quoted directly from the Septuagint (Psalm xc, 1). But they were also found painted on the lintel of a house in Ruwêḥa;⁷ they occur in an inscription found at Homs and published by M. Lammens in the *Musée Belge*, 1901, p. 291, No. 64. The rest of the inscription

¹ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 234.

² Schlumberger, *l.c.*, V, pp. 80 f. (from Beirût).

³ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 219: [Ἐμμ]ανουήλ, ΧΜΓ, Χριστὸς νικᾷ.

⁴ *Ibid.* No. 318. Also in *Inscriptions of the Princeton Archaeological Expedition* in 1905, not yet published.

⁵ *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. XVI, *Appendix*, p. cxv.

⁶ *Quarterly Statements P. E. F.*, 1895, pp. 124 ff.

⁷ Waddington, 2672; *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 267. The same words were also found, on a broken sarcophagus at Midjleyya (*Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 207), and in two Syriac inscriptions. The whole of the Ruwêḥa inscription is as follows: *He that dwelleth in the help of the Most High shall abide in the shelter of the God of Heaven. He shall say unto the Lord: Thou art my protector and my refuge, my God: I will trust in Him.*

on the amulet, *βοήθι*, ἄγιος Κύριος, Ἰουλιάνῳ, τῷ δούλ(ῳ) σου, τῷ φορο(ῶν)τι, excepting, of course, the words τῷ φοροῦντι, *the bearer*, which are appropriate only to an amulet, is the very commonest of all the formulae which appear upon the house-lintels. Numerous variations, equivalent in meaning, may be found in almost every collection of post-classical inscriptions, especially, of course, of those from Syria. On my first visit there I found *βοήθει* or *βοήθησον* some twenty times, and almost always on lintels, generally of houses; for example, *βοέθι Κύριε, Help Lord*; *Κύ(ριε) Χρυστὲ βοήθι, Lord Christ help*; *Κύριε τῆς δόξης βοέθισον ἐμῖν πάντας, Lord of Glory help us all*; *Χρυστὲ βοέθι, Christ help*; [Ἰησοῦ] *Χρηστὲ βοήθ[ει], Jesus Christ help*; *Ἰη(σοῦ)ς βοήθι, Jesus help*; not to mention the phrase *Κύρ(ιε) βοήθι τ(ῇ)ν ἵσοδον, Lord help the entrance*,¹ which I take to be the equivalent of the very common *Κύριος φυλάξει* (or *Κύριε, φύλαξον*) *τὴν εἰσοδὸν σου καὶ τὴν ἐξοδόν*,² *The Lord shall guard thy coming in and thy going out*. This list also excludes the very common formulae in which the *βοήθει Κύριε* is combined with the *Εἰς Θεὸς μόνος*, as for example, *Εἰς Θεὸς μόνος, ὁ βοηθῶν πᾶσιν, One God alone, who aideth all*.³ It also excludes those inscriptions in which various saints are invoked with some form of the verb *βοηθεῖν*, as *✠ Ἀγιε Σέργι βοήθεσον, Saint Sergius help!* In somewhat more than half the cases there is added, either with or without τῷ δούλῳ σου (*thy servant*), the name of the person (or persons) for whom aid is sought, just as in the case of the amulet.

On my second visit to Syria I found, as before, many of these *βοήθει* inscriptions, and among them the following, which has certain refinements which deserve special mention. It is from a house-lintel, still *in situ*, in the ruined town now called Mir-âyeh, near Kerratîn it-Tudjdjar (i.e. *Tarutia of the merchants*) :

ΧΜΓΣΘΙΧΘΥC	Disk with P T	ΑΚΟΗΚΥΡΙΒΤΩΔΤΑΥ
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¹ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 184, from Khribit Hâss.

² Psalms cxx, 8. See *Trans. Am. Philol. Assoc.*, 1902, p. 94.

³ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 22, from Djūwāniyeh.

It is characteristic of certain writers that they seek to make themselves incomprehensible to the ordinary man. It was so with Heracleitus the Obscure; it is so with certain novelists of our own day. It has always been so with those who deal with magic. In accomplishing this purpose the Greeks had a peculiar advantage in that the letters of their alphabet were used also for numerical signs. Consequently it was always possible for the Greeks to represent any group of letters whose numerical values equalled a certain sum, by another group of letters whose numerical values equalled the same sum. This matter has been discussed by a number of scholars, last of all, I think, by M. Perdrizet, in an article entitled 'Isopséphie,' in the *Revue des Études Grecques* (1904, pp. 350 ff.). So in the following inscription, which seems to be a prayer addressed to God or Christ, $\phi\lambda\epsilon' \mu\eta\sigma\theta\eta\tau\iota \tau\omicron\upsilon \delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon \sigma\omicron\upsilon$, M. Perdrizet has pointed out that $\phi\lambda\epsilon' = 535 = 20$ (i.e. κ') + 400 (ν') + 100 (ρ') + 10 (ι') + 5 (ϵ'). The inscription, therefore, is to be read, $\text{Κύριε μνήσθητι τοῦ δούλου σου}$, *Lord, remember thy servant*. It has been generally recognized that the number of the beast in Revelation xiii, 18, has a similar explanation. The same method has been applied in composing the inscription on the Mir'āyeh lintel. The first group of letters, ΧΜΓ, appears very frequently on Syrian lintels, and has been much discussed. M. de Vogüé, de Rossi, and others have believed that these letters signify X(ριστός), M(ιχαήλ), Γ(αβριήλ), *Christ, Michael, Gabriel*. But in my opinion this explanation is unsatisfactory because of the context in which these letters sometimes appear. For example, in an inscription upon a rock-hewn tomb at Hâss,¹ $\text{Εἰς Θεός, ΧΜΓ, μόνος}$, it is obviously impossible to read, *There is one God, Christ, Michael, Gabriel, alone*. Waddington, on the other hand, proposed to read these letters X(ριστός) (ὁ ἐκ) M(αρίας) γ(εννηθείς), *Christ, born of Mary*; and this reading is confirmed by an inscription discovered by Waddington on a house in Refādeh,² $\text{✠ Ἰησ(οῦ)ς ὁ Ναζωρεῦς, ὁ ἐκ Μαρίας}$

¹ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 155. See also Nos. 221, 224, 233, and 234.

² Waddington, No. 2697 = *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 120.

γεννηθίς, ὁ Υ(ιὸς) τοῦ Θ(εο)ῦ, ἐνθα κατοικί κτλ. *Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of Mary, the Son of God, dwells here, etc.* At the same time, as M. Perdrizet suggests, these letters may also have a cryptogrammic significance, such, for example, as that proposed by M. Perdrizet himself : $\text{XM}\Gamma = 643 = 1 (a') + 3 (\gamma') + 5 (\epsilon') + 10 (\iota') + 70 (o') + 200 (\sigma') + 70 (o') + 9 (\theta') + 5 (\epsilon') + 70 (o') + 200 (\sigma') = \text{Ἀγείος ὁ Θεός, Holy (is) God.}$ These words form the beginning of the *trisagion*, which occurs repeatedly in the Greek liturgies ;¹ if they were used as a magic formula, they may properly be compared with the words Ἄγιος Κύριος on the amulet of the Metropolitan Museum.² They also recall the words on an amulet published by Froehner in *Philologus*, Supplementband V (1889), p. 43, and again by M. Schlumberger in the *Revue des Études Grecques*, 1892, p. 91. Both these editors give the text as follows : ✠ Ἀγιος, ἄγιος, ἄγιος, Κ(ύρι)ε Σαβαώθ, ὁ ἀηρης (?), ὁ οὐρανός. It takes, however, a very slight emendation to read πλήρης for the incomprehensible ὁ ἀηρης. We have then the familiar *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, heaven is full (of thee)!* The same words appear with some variations on other amulets published by M. Perdrizet in an article entitled Σφραγὶς Σολομῶνος (*Solomon's Seal*), in the *Revue des Études Grecques*, 1903, pp. 42 ff. I have found the same words on house-lintels, for example at il-Berdoneh, it-Taiyibeh, and il-'Anz.

The second group of letters in the Mir'âyeh inscription is $\vartheta\theta$; and it is well known that $\vartheta\theta' = 99 = 1 (a') + 40 (\mu') + 8 (\eta') + 50 (\nu') = \text{Ἀμήν, Amen.}$ ³

The third group is the very familiar IXΘYC, letters which, as initials, signify Ἰ(ησοῦς) Χ(ριστός), Θ(εο)ῦ Υ(ιός), Σ(ωτήρ), *Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour*, and which together form the Greek word ἰχθύς, *fish*, and suggested to the early Christians the use of a fish as a symbol of their faith.

¹ *Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy upon us.* See *Trans. Am. Phil. Assoc.*, 1902, pp. 81 ff.

² See above, p. 144.

³ See, for example, G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament*, 1905, Vol. III, p. xlv.

Perhaps these letters have some occult significance also; but if so, it is unknown to me.

The next group is ΑΚΟΗ. This, of course, is the Greek word ἀκοή, *hearing*; but the letters obviously have some other meaning. Now ΑΚΟΗ = α' (1) + κ' (20) + ο' (70) + η' (8) = 99 = 1 (α') + 40 (μ') + 8 (η') + 50 (ν') = Ἀμὴν. The letters ΑΚΟΗ, therefore, have the same cryptic significance as ϑΘ.

The obscurity of the remainder of this inscription is secured partly by abbreviation: it may be read Κύρι(ε), β(οήθει) τῷ δ(ούλῳ) (σου) Παύ(λῳ), *Lord, help thy servant Paul*. Of the phrase, βοήθει τῷ δέινα, τῷ δούλῳ σου, I have already spoken.¹ It is significant in this connection, I think, that such phrases are common on Byzantine seals also; for example, ✠ Κ(ύρι)ε, βοήθει τῷ σῷ δού[λῳ] Αἰλῖα,² *Lord, help thy servant Ailias*, or Θεοτόκε, βοήθει τῷ δούλῳ σου,³ *Mother of God, help thy servant*. At the same time, the method of abbreviation on the Mir'âyeh lintel is striking, and suggests that there may be some hidden meaning in these letters after all. If the *iota subscript* in τῷ be included, then the sum of the numerical values of the letters, Κύρι β. τῷ δ. Παύ. equals 1227 = Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος,⁴ *Jesus of Nazareth*.

I have spoken elsewhere of the cryptogram involved in the inscription in the tomb at Shnân,⁵ where a refrain, Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός, *Jesus the Christ*, is written out in full, but is also expressed, at the end of each line, in the form BYMΓ = 2443 = 10 (ι') + 8 (η') + 200 (σ') + 70 (ο') + 400 (ν') + 200 (σ') + 70 (ο') + 600 (χ') + 100 (ρ') + 5 (ε') + 10 (ι') + 200 (σ') + 300 (τ') + 70 (ο') + 200 (σ') = Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός. There is one other cryptogram among the inscriptions which I collected in Syria, and this, I think, is the most important of all. It is on a lintel at

¹ See above, p. 145.

² Schlumberger, *Rev. d. Études Grecques*, VII (1894), pp. 323 ff.

³ *Ibid.* p. 330; this seal belongs to the eighth or ninth century.

⁴ Cf. John xix, 19.

⁵ *Publications Am. Arch. Exp.* III, Chap. I. See also *Trans. Am. Philol. Assoc.* XXXIII (1902), p. 95, and Pétridès's article in *Echos d'Orient*, 1904, p. 185.

Serdjilla,¹ over the outer doorway of a passage leading to a group of small buildings adjoining the church and probably used as dwellings by the clergy. The lintel is a large block with a smooth face, and bears simply the letters HNA. The letters are large, well cut, and perfectly preserved: there is nothing else upon the lintel. The numerical value of these letters is 8051, and this is the sum of the numerical values of the letters which compose a verse from the Psalms,² very common on lintels, especially in this region, in the form Κύριος φυλάξη³ τὴν εἰσοδὸν σου καὶ τὴν ἔξοδόν σου, ἀπὸ νῦν καὶ ἕως αἰώνων· ἀμήν, *The Lord shall preserve thy coming in and thy going out, from now even for evermore.* It seems to me clear that, when this verse was written so, as a cryptogram, it was not intended either as an expression of piety or for the edification of the men who passed beneath the lintel; but that it was regarded as a formula with magic power to avert the evil spirits which might otherwise enter here. And if *such* a verse was used on lintels solely as a magic charm, there is good reason to suspect that most of the so-called Christian inscriptions, especially those on the lintels of dwelling-houses, had the same character and purpose. If so, then they did not differ essentially from that other common formula, which I believe belongs originally to the pagan time, and which is frequently met with on house-lintels, Ὅσα λέγεις, φίλε, καὶ σοὶ τὰ διπλᾶ, *What thou sayest, friend, may that be to thee also, twofold; i.e. If thou blessest this house and its inmates, may thy blessings return upon thee, and if thou cursest, may thy curses return upon thee, doubled.* Only this pagan formula was addressed to men, and intended to avert their curses or invite their blessings, while the so-called Christian formulae were addressed primarily to the evil spirits.

Superstition is at least nearly as old as man, and we our-

¹ *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, No. 220.

² Psalms cxx, 8. See above, p. 145.

³ The form φυλάξη, which I believe to be for φυλάξει, not for φυλάξη, is found on two lintels in the neighboring town il-Barah; *Am. Arch. Exp.* III, Nos. 192 and 193 (Waddington, No. 2646); compare also No. 194.

selves are not free from it, when we refrain from passing under a ladder, or from playing against the grain of the table. But it tends somewhat to disillusionment to discover how much of pure superstition there was in what at first sight seems to be the genuine expression of sincere piety on the part of the Syrian Christians in the fifth and sixth centuries.

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